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ABSTRACT

In 1988, Confederation College and Lakehead University jointly established the Centre of Entrepreneurship for the Northwest (CEN) at Thunder Bay (Ontario). The CEN was expected to meet the general student population's need for broad awareness of the role and importance of entrepreneurship to the Canadian economy, as well as the needs of a small proportion of students for self-employment skills. A series of four multidisciplinary courses were envisioned at the outset. The first course introduced was entitled "Entrepreneurial Perspectives." It focused on the nature and economic role of entrepreneurship, business idea generation, and the skills, characteristics, and motivations frequently found in successful entrepreneurs. Three follow-up courses were developed for students with a stronger interest in entrepreneurship, "Planning for New Ventures," "Venturing for Start-Up Success," and "Managing for Growth." In addition, the business division of Confederation College developed two entrepreneurial-related courses in collaboration with the CEN: an introductory course for business students, and a second course exploring the ways that entrepreneurial behavior can be incorporated into a corporate setting. CEN's largest undertaking was the development with the business division of a 1-year certificate program focusing on basic business start-up and survival skills. The program includes courses in "Entrepreneurship," "Entrepreneurship Self-Development," "Communications for Small Business," "Small Business Development," "Business Planning," "Marketing for Small Business," "Microcomputer Applications," "Financial Analysis," "Financial Management for Entrepreneurs," "Human Resources," "Securing Resources," "Facing the Start-Up Period," "International Trade," and "Managing Your Venture." (WJT)

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DEVELOPMENTS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AT CONFEDERATION COLLEGE OF APPLIED ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

Graham Clayton, Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a brief introduction to the Centre of Entrepreneurship for the Northwest (CEN). It then focuses on the centre's activities in the area of entrepreneurship curriculum development at Confederation College. A sequence of four courses being developed for multi-discipline delivery is reviewed, as are two courses developed for business program students. This is followed by some brief remarks concerning entrepreneurship curriculum developments in other areas of the college. The paper continues with a discussion of a new one-year certificate program designed for would-be entrepreneurs. The centre's links with the Northwest Enterprise Centre are then briefly reviewed. Finally, the paper closes with a discussion of two new significant developments at Confederation College.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1988, the Government of Ontario funded the establishment of a network of six entrepreneurship centres. Ten colleges and universities participate in this network, including Confederation College and Lakehead University which jointly established the Centre of Entrepreneurship for the Northwest at Thunder Bay. Common to the mandate of each of the centres was the requirement to introduce entrepreneurship curriculum at the postsecondary level. This paper reviews CEN efforts in entrepreneurship curriculum development at Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology.

From the outset, it was recognized that the needs of the college student vis à vis entrepreneurship education would vary considerably. It was felt that most would benefit from a general awareness of the role and importance of entrepreneurship to the Canadian economy. While the majority of college graduates become employees, many secure employment with small- to medium-sized firms, and increasingly with newly established firms. A general introduction to entrepreneurship could make such graduates better informed employees when it came to working for smaller establishments.

It was also recognized that a minority of the graduates of the college would at some point in their working life become self-employed in some line of business. The broad array of applied programs offered by the college, many of which offer clear start-up possibilities for the graduate, meant that the CEN should offer courses on a multi-disciplinary basis. There should be no business prerequisites to constitute a barrier for such students. The needs of these students

could be met either through courses developed for non-business students or through entrepreneurial modules developed for insertion into existing courses which would address specific knowledge needs.

The needs of the business student might differ somewhat from the needs of students in other fields. Thus entrepreneurship courses could be developed which assumed a greater level of business knowledge and awareness on the part of the student. In addition, courses might be developed in the area of entrepreneurial management or entrepreneurship.

While pondering the above undergraduate curriculum options, the CEN was also aware of the desirability of making curriculum available for both continuing education and distance education students. The region serviced by Confederation College is geographically as large as France, but sparsely populated, a factor which makes distance education a key vehicle for meeting the needs of remote communities.

Finally, what of the needs of the would-be entrepreneur who already had the basis for starting a business, but who was lacking in a number of areas of knowledge vital for having a reasonable chance of start-up success? Could a program be developed to give such a person the requisite training?

The CEN eventually committed to work in each of the above-identified curriculum development areas. From the outset, it was recognized that support from the other divisions of the college was essential for success. This paper outlines entrepreneurship educational developments at Confederation College since the establishment of the CEN. It also includes insights into future developments at the college.

MULTI-DISCIPLINE CURRICULUM

It was decided at the proposal stage for CEN that the first courses to be developed in entrepreneurship would be for multi-discipline delivery and would be offered outside of the business division. From the outset, it was recognized that there was a need to stress the difference between entrepreneurship and small business management.

A sequence of four courses was envisioned with each subsequent course being a natural follow-up to its predecessor. The courses would be developed over a three-year period with phased introduction initially as electives in the division of applied arts. The intent was to establish from the outset, the view that entrepreneurship is not something to be targeted strictly at business students. Since the majority of people who start businesses in Canada do not have business education backgrounds, then perhaps entrepreneurship education should be significantly targeted at non-business students. So went the thinking.

The first course to be introduced was entitled "Entrepreneurial Perspectives" (GS 167). It is an introductory overview course that has no prerequisites and is available to students in any program. To date, it has been taught five times with three daytime sections and two continuing education sections.

Studies of entrepreneurship, and of the experiences of American colleges and universities involved in entrepreneurship education, had led the CEN to recognize very early that successful entrepreneurship teaching would frequently require non-conventional approaches and course formats. The curriculum development process would entail experimentation and learning by doing. GS 167 is a typical example of the non-conventional type of course. It has very little in the way of testing geared to memorization when it comes to student evaluation. The approach, instead, focuses on learning-by-doing type activities with written assignments and in-class participation.

In GS 167, the student is first introduced to the nature of entrepreneurship and to its important role in the Canadian economy. This is followed by a discussion of factors conducive to entrepreneurship. A natural extension of this leads to the study of characteristics, skills and motivations frequently found in successful entrepreneurs. The students are required to interview two local entrepreneurs about their endeavors and experiences. This provides them with first-hand insights of a hopefully more lasting nature and also helps them in doing a self-assessment for an entrepreneurial career. While most students are not yet ready for an entrepreneurial career, this type of self-awareness exercise can be a valuable experience. It also serves as a lead-in to a discussion of alternative legal forms that a business might take. The next subject area addressed in the course is that of business opportunity identification. Considerable time is spent discussing how different entrepreneurs come by their business ideas. This entails a variety of both anecdotal and historical information. This is an ideal point in the course for guest appearances by entrepreneurs who can discuss how they came up with their business ideas. The students are next taught some fifteen left and right brain creative-thinking, idea-generation techniques. This is followed by a discussion of commercial assessments of business ideas. The students then do an assignment where they come up with an idea for a business opportunity and assess it for commercial viability. The emphasis here is on having the student go through the business idea generation and assessment process, not on coming up with a commercially viable idea. This topic leads in to a basic discussion of business plans, including their key components, and to a discussion of requirements for business start-up. The course concludes with a discussion of success and failure factors for entrepreneurs and a look at the changing role of the entrepreneur in a growing business.

It is recognized that for many students, GS 167 will be their first and last course in entrepreneurship. For other students, whose appetite for entrepreneurship knowledge has been whetted, three follow-up courses are planned. These are "Planning for New Ventures" which focuses on pre-start-up planning, "Venturing for Start-Up Success"

which deals with the start-up process and "Managing for Growth." Planning for New Ventures will be offered this January for students having completed GS 167. It is hoped that eventually each of the three follow-up courses for GS 167 will be available to continuing education students.

BUSINESS DIVISION CURRICULUM

At the time that the CEN was developing GS 167 and its sequel, the business division of the college was conducting a review of its programs. The outcome of the review was in part a decision to introduce two new courses of an entrepreneurial nature to be developed in collaboration with the CEN. The first course, GB 308, is a basic introductory course in entrepreneurship which has a lot of material in common with GS 167, but with content detail and delivery geared to a business student's background. The second course, GB 400, deals with the subject of intrapreneurship and is being designed to familiarize students with the various ways that entrepreneurial behaviour can be inculcated into a larger business or corporate setting. GB 308 was first offered in the daytime this fall with double the expected level of enrolment. The CEN developed a distance education version of the course for satellite delivery throughout northwestern Ontario which is currently being offered. GB 400, Intrapreneurship, is currently under development and will be offered in January. Here again the CEN is developing a version for satellite delivery in January 1990.

The business division is also working to increasingly entrepreneurialize existing business curriculum.

OTHER COLLEGE DIVISIONS

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology typically have a variety of programs in their non-business divisions that could benefit from the inclusion of entrepreneurship topics. This could be achieved in a variety of ways including the development of tailor-made courses or modules which address specific entrepreneurial needs for particular college programs.

The CEN is getting involved in such development at Confederation College. The first area of such involvement was curriculum revision for the Native Band Management Program where native entrepreneurship was identified as a key component of native community economic development. This subject had not been addressed when the program was originally formulated.

The technology division is another area in which the CEN has a strong interest in revising curriculum to include an entrepreneurial component. Technological entrepreneurship offers many opportunities for technology program graduates which are not presently being addressed by the division. The creative application of technology for commercial ends is seen as being crucial for the continued vitality of the Canadian economy.

CERTIFICATE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The largest single undertaking of the CEN to date has been a collaborative effort with the college business division. It was recognized that many would-be entrepreneurs could probably benefit immensely from a one-year program in entrepreneurship geared to intensive training in basic business start-up and survival skills. A package of forty-one modules was developed covering a wide array of business topics regarded as being invaluable for success in the start-up process. These were then combined to form fourteen entrepreneurship courses which are offered over a two-semester period. This program is now being taught at Confederation College.

In designing the program curriculum, attention was given to teaching skills and knowledge that would give the student a well-rounded background in the new business start-up process. Total classroom time for the program is 470 hours. The list of subjects to be taken is as follows:

- Entrepreneurship
- Entrepreneurship Self-development
- Communications for Small Business
- Small Business Development
- Business Planning
- Marketing for Small Business
- Microcomputer Applications
- Financial Analysis
- Financial Management for Entrepreneurs
- Human Resources
- Securing Resources
- Facing the Start-Up Period
- International Trade
- Managing Your Venture

The program is team-taught with participating faculty focussing on their respective areas of expertise. The courses have been structured and ordered so as to make the learning process a natural progression for the student. While this makes for greater difficulty in delivering the program, the increased ease in learning the material from the student's standpoint is regarded as being worth the extra effort.

A unique aspect of the one-year certificate program is the requirement that students develop a bankable business plan for a new business. It is expected that most students interested in this program will already have a fairly good idea about the kind of business that they would like to start. Much of the content of the various courses is geared to providing the student with business skills that can be put to use in developing their business plan. In addition to the 470 hours of scheduled classroom time, a further 210 hours of lab, advisory and business plan-related fieldwork time are built into the program. In order to graduate, students must have their business plans approved by a program advisory board.

The one-year certificate program is meant to be comparable to a graduate or post-basic program in terms of difficulty. It is felt that serious would-be entrepreneurs will see the program as a worthwhile investment in their entrepreneurial future. The overriding objective of this program, once again, is to provide would-be entrepreneurs with key business start-up and survival skills which they can go out and directly apply. It is hoped that at least half of the students in the program will go out and start new businesses within one year of graduating.

Presently Confederation College is working with other colleges in northern Ontario that wish to offer the one-year certificate program to prospective entrepreneurs in their region.

NORTHWEST ENTERPRISE CENTRE LINKS

The CEN also collaborates with the Northwest Enterprise Centre (NEC), an arm of Confederation College which has established widespread recognition for its numerous entrepreneurial training programs. The NEC was established five years ago in response to a community need for entrepreneurial business training in a non-classroom format.

In particular, it was found that many business owners who could benefit from extended programs designed to upgrade entrepreneurial skills were not served well by traditional business course offerings at the college. The NEC responded to this situation by developing a variety of entrepreneurial programs which many hundreds of individuals and firms have participated in. Many of the programs have been replicated across Canada. In addition, the NEC has taken the experience acquired in Canada and incorporated it in programs designed to meet the entrepreneurial needs of developing countries.

The CEN is now working with the NEC in some of its curriculum update efforts as well as in designing localised entrepreneurial curriculum for educational institutions in developing countries.

OTHER EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

During the last six months the CEN has become involved in two new educational developments at Confederation College. The first deals with business planning while the second deals with international business.

Confederation College, along with several other Ontario postsecondary institutions and a number of government agencies, is participating in a program aimed at developing extensive curriculum in business planning. The tentative objective is to develop 100 hours of planning curriculum in a modular format for distance education delivery via satellite. The curriculum will cover planning for both new business start-ups and for established businesses and will be offered in both English and French. The target date for the introduction of the new curriculum is September 1990.

The second area of new CEN curriculum developments comes out of the recognized need for Confederation College to begin offering international business education. The CEN has developed a new course, GS 185, "International Trade - How To Do It", which begins in January 1990. Other courses are under development for likely integration by the soon-to-be established Department for Hospitality, Tourism and International Business at Confederation College.

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